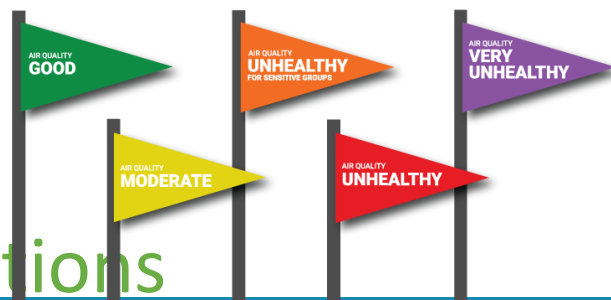




## NEW JERSEY AIR QUALITY FLAG PROGRAM



# Frequently Asked Questions

### WHAT IS THE NEW JERSEY AIR QUALITY FLAG PROGRAM?

The New Jersey Air Quality Flag Program uses brightly colored flags to notify people and their communities about outdoor air quality conditions. Organizations raise a flag each day to communicate how clean or polluted the air is. Flag colors correspond to EPA's Air Quality Index (AQI): green, yellow, orange, red and purple. Each color corresponds to a potential health impact and actions to take to reduce health impacts. On unhealthy days, your organization can adjust physical activities to help reduce exposure to air pollution and still keep people active. By creating public awareness of air quality conditions, individuals and communities can adjust levels of outdoor activity to reduce exposure to air pollution, while still remaining physically active. For more information on how to partner with the DEP to implement the New Jersey Air Quality Flag Program at your organization, visit <https://dep.nj.gov/njaqflagprogram>.

### DOES MY ORGANIZATION HAVE TO BE LOCATED IN NEW JERSEY TO PARTICIPATE?

Yes, this program is specific to New Jersey. Only organizations located within the state are eligible to participate.

### WHAT ORGANIZATIONS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR FREE FLAGS AND EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS?

Eligible partners include schools, senior centers, summer camps and day care centers.

### IF MY ORGANIZATION DOES HAVE TO PAY FOR FLAGS, HOW MUCH WILL THEY COST?

A set of flags will cost you under \$100 dollars, usually ranging somewhere between \$70-90 depending on the vendor you choose.

### WHO DO I CONTACT TO ORDER FLAGS IF MY ORGANIZATION NEEDS TO, AND HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE FOR THEM TO BE DELIVERED?

Contact a local Flag Vendor near you. Your order should consist of a set of 5 flags with the colors being green, yellow, orange, red and purple. It is recommended that you select pennant style flags, 2 feet by 3 feet in size. The vendor will provide you with a timeline on delivery. Here is a link with Flag ordering tips <https://www.airnow.gov/air-quality-flag-program/flag-ordering-tips/>.

## WHAT IS THE AIR QUALITY INDEX OR AQI?

The AQI is a tool for reporting daily air quality levels for ozone and fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>). It uses colors and numbers to show how clean or polluted the air is compared to the pollutant's National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS). The AQI also provides guidelines on the associated health effects and recommended actions to take for each level of the index.

For more information on the AQI and how it works, please see <https://airnow.gov/aqi/aqi-basics>

## WHAT IS THE "UNHEALTHY FOR SENSITIVE GROUP (USG)" CATEGORY?

AQI values between 101 and 150 are indicative of air quality measuring above the NAAQS for that pollutant. Members of sensitive groups (those with heart or lung disease, older adults, children, people with diabetes) may experience health effects when air quality is in this range, whereas the general public is less likely to be affected.

## ARE HEALTHY CHILDREN PART OF THE "UNHEALTHY FOR SENSITIVE GROUPS" CATEGORY?

Healthy children are considered to be part of the sensitive group for ozone and particle pollution. Children are usually more active outdoors than adults, and they breathe more air per pound of body weight, meaning their exposure to air pollution is greater than adults. In addition, their lungs are still developing. It's variable, but most children's lungs don't finish developing until they finish growing, usually around the age of 18. Studies indicate that air pollution can affect this development. Children are also more likely to have asthma than adults, which can be aggravated by air pollution. This may lead to health impacts such as increased medication use and increased visits to health care providers, including emergency rooms.

## HOW DO I KNOW IF IT'S OKAY TO PARTICIPATE IN SPORTS OR STRENUOUS ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE?

Check the AQI for the daily air quality forecast and the current air quality conditions. The Activity Guideline for the New Jersey Air Quality Flag Program also provides useful information at: <https://www.airnow.gov/sites/default/files/2020-03/school-outdoor%20activity%20guidance.pdf>

## WHAT IS OZONE?

Ground-level ozone is an air pollutant known to cause a number of health effects and negatively impact air quality and the environment. Ozone is often a summertime problem because sunlight and warmer temperatures play a key role in the formation of ozone. Since people are more active outdoors in good weather, it is important to keep track of ozone air quality levels during the summer months.

The ozone season in New Jersey is from March through October, however higher ozone levels tend to become an issue in New Jersey from May through September. Ozone at ground level is formed through a chemical reaction between nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the presence of heat and sunlight. Sources of NO<sub>x</sub> and VOC emissions include cars, trucks, and industrial sources such as power plants, industrial boilers, refineries, and chemical plants.

### **WHAT IS ASTHMA?**

Asthma is a condition that makes it difficult to breathe. It usually begins with exposure to a "trigger," which is something (usually an external allergen) that causes the airways to react. During an asthma attack, the lung airways tighten and fill with fluid. The resulting effects are chest tightness, wheezing, breathlessness, and coughing. Asthma affects all races, ages and genders. There are many triggers of asthma attacks and outdoor air conditions can be one of them. High levels of ozone and fine particulate matter (PM2.5) can trigger asthma in children, particularly during the warm months in spring and summer.

### **CAN I GET MY LOCAL AIR QUALITY DATA AND FORECASTS SENT TO ME EVERY DAY?**

Yes. Sign up for EnviroFlash at [www.enviroflash.info](http://www.enviroflash.info), to receive your local air quality emails or to have air quality information sent to your cell phone.

### **HOW DO I SIGN UP FOR AIR QUALITY EMAILS OR TEXT MESSAGES?**

EnviroFlash is a free online alert system, that delivers air quality information, such as forecasts and action day notifications straight to your email inbox or cell phone. EnviroFlash is a partnership between EPA and NJDEP.

### **WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT AIR POLLUTION IN NEW JERSEY?**

The Division of Air Quality (DAQ) within the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection is dedicated to ensuring clean air for both public health and the environment. You can learn more about New Jersey's DAQ programs and their efforts at <https://www.state.nj.us/dep/daq/>

## **References**

USEPA. Airnow. <https://www.airnow.gov/aqi/aqi-basics/> (Accessed February 14, 2022)

## **Contact**

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